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Procrastination in College Students: Relationship with Personality Traits and Perceived Parenting

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The beginning of young adulthood is often accompanied by starting of college life for most individuals. It is a phase of transition that has its own set of concerns. With so many things to juggle during college years, many students become procrastinators and engage in task-avoidance behaviors. The present study aimed at exploring the relationship of procrastination with personality traits and dimensions of perceived parenting among undergraduate students (N=120; 60 males and 60 females; 18-22 years). The participants completed Lay's Procrastination Scale, NEO Five-Factor Inventory, and Scale of Parenting Style. The results revealed a strong association between procrastination and personality traits like neuroticism, conscientiousness and extraversion. These traits also emerged as significant predictors of procrastination. Furthermore, a significant inverse relationship was found between perceived parental responsiveness and procrastination. Perceived parental responsiveness was also found to significantly predict procrastination. Besides, no difference was seen between males and females in procrastination.

Keywords: Procrastination, Perceived Parenting, Personality Traits

Procrastination can be defined as delaying tasks, activities and decisions until the next day. It is characterized by consistent delaying behaviors without considering the consequences (Van Eerde, 2003). Many college students complain of not being able to complete assignments or tasks until the deadline. Even when they feel uncomfortable and guilty of doing so, they find themselves unable to bring a change in this behavior. Procrastination and task-avoidance behaviors are extraordinarily usual. Larwood (1990) has called procrastination as "one of the least understood minor human miseries, affecting 15-25% of the population during their lifetime". However, not much scientific credence has been given to this construct.

Some part of the literature suggests that procrastination is solely related to individual factors like personality traits (Lee, Kelly and Edwards, 2006; Watson 2001). However, others have started to point out that socio-environmental factors like parenting also play a role in the development of task-avoidance behaviors.

Researchers have examined the relationship between procrastination and dimensions of parenting among school students (Mikaeili & Salmani, 2021; Gunduz, 2020). Parental pressure, over-emphasis on achievement, and unrealistic expectations can make children avoid and delay tasks because the tasks ignite feelings of stress and anxiety Missildine (1963). Repeated exposure to coercive and punitive forms of evaluation also promotes avoidance behaviour (Flett et al, 1992).

Most of the studies done in the past involve school students. In a country like India, parenting plays a crucial role even during adulthood as most individuals stay with their parents, unlike in the western culture. Thus, it becomes important to understand the relationship between parenting and procrastination among individuals transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood in the Indian context.

Therefore, the current study aimed at exploring the relationship of perceived parenting and personality traits with procrastination in college-going students. It also sought to evaluate the gender differences in procrastination. The purpose of the study was to contribute to the empirical explanations of antecedents of procrastination that can foster a better understanding of the maladaptive and dysfunctional behavioral patterns.

Method

Participants

The data was collected from 120 (60 males; 60 females) college students between the age range of 18-22 years (mean age = 19.52 ± 1.06) enrolled in any of the undergraduate courses at colleges in Delhi, and could read and understand the English language. Response sheets of only those participants were included whose both parents were alive and living together. Levene's statistic value came out to be 0.386 ($p > 0.05$) which indicated homogeneity of variance.

Tools

Lay's Procrastination Scale (LPS)-Student Version: It is a 20-item scale that assesses general procrastination. The scale has an established test-retest reliability (0.80), internal consistency (Cronbach á= 0.82), and construct valid-ity in the general population and university students.

NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO FFI) (Form S-Adults): NEO FFI consists 60 items with 12 items dedicated to each factor. NEO FFI is reliable with test-retest reliability coefficients as 0.79, 0.79, 0.80, 0.75 and 0.83 for the subscales of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness, respectively. The convergent validity correlation ranges from 0.56 to 0.62 and none of the discriminant correlations go beyond 0.20. NEO FFI has been validated in the Indian context (Singh, 2009; Piedmont & Braganza, 2015).

Scale of Parenting Style: It is a 38 item self-report measure developed by Gafoor and Kurukkan (2014) keeping in mind the Indian parenting practices. It assesses parental control and parental responsiveness. The scale is reliable with the test-retest coefficients for perceived parental responsiveness and perceived parental control being 0.81 and 0.83 respectively. The criterion-related validity coefficients for perceived parental responsiveness and perceived parental control are 0.80 and 0.76 respectively which were established by correlating with the Scale of Parenting Style developed by Usha and Manjusha (2006).

Procedure

Students from various colleges in Delhi were approached for data collection. After taking informed consent and giving clear instructions, the participants were asked to fill out the measures. 154 response sheets were collected out of which 34 were not included in the study due to random responses and inclusion criteria. The data was analyzed using SPSS 21. Correlational analysis was followed by stepwise multiple regression. An independent t-test was carried out to delineate the gender differences in procrastination.

Results

Gender Difference

Table 1 depicts the Mean and SD of procrastination scores for male (N=60) and female (N=60) participants. Independent t-test between males and females on procrastination revealed no significant gender difference (-0.489; $p > 0.05$).

Table 1. Mean and SD of Procrastination among males and females

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Procrastination	Female	60	59.60	10.769
	Male	60	60.58	11.275
	Total	120	60.09	10.990

Relationship between Personality Traits and Procrastination

Conscientiousness was found to be significantly and negatively related to procrastination ($r = -0.694$; $p < 0.01$). A significant and positive correlation was found between the neuroticism and procrastination ($r = 0.401$; $p < 0.01$). A significant negative relationship between extraversion and procrastination was also seen ($r = -0.433$; $p < 0.01$). However, there was no significant relationship between procrastination and openness to experience and agreeableness (See Table 2).

Table 2. Pearson's product-moment correlation of Personality Traits and Perceived Parenting with Procrastination.

		Procrastination
Personality Traits	Neuroticism	0.401**
	Extraversion	-0.433**
	Openness to Experience	-0.020
	Agreeableness	-0.087
	Conscientiousness	-0.694**
Perceived Parenting	Perceived Parental Control	-0.102
	Perceived Parental Responsiveness	-0.242**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

The stepwise multiple regression model accounted for a total of 58.7% ($R^2 = 0.587$) variance in procrastination scores. Conscientiousness came out to be the most significant predictor of procrastination and contributed 48.2% ($R^2 = 0.482$; $\beta = -0.627$) to the total of 58.7 % variance in procrastination scores. Addition of neuroticism in the model lead to a change of 6.6% (R^2 change = 0.066; $\beta = 0.206$) in the total variance. Furthermore, inclusion of extraversion brought a change of 2.2% (R^2 change = 0.022; â = -0.167) in the total variance. Lastly, addition of openness to experience produced a change of 1.7% (R^2 change = 0.017; â = 0.138) of the total of 58.7% variance in procrastination scores (See table 3).

Even though openness to experience was not significantly related to procrastination, it contributed to the total variance in procrastination scores. This finding can be explained by the fact that openness to experience was significantly correlated with conscientiousness ($r = 0.257$; $p < 0.01$) which is significantly associated with and predicts procrastination. However, collinearity diagnostics revealed the variance inflation factor (VIF) to be less than 5 (VIF= 1.096). This implies that the variance is not highly inflated by the existent collinearity and that the collinearity was not significant enough to impact the total variance in procrastination scores accounted by the regression model.

Table 3. Stepwise multiple regression models of Personality Traits and Perceived Parenting on Procrastination

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable(s)	R^2	R^2 Change	F	Beta
Procrastination	Conscientiousness	0.482	0.482	109.788**	-0.694
	Conscientiousness	0.548	0.066	70.887**	-0.637
	Neuroticism				0.263
	Conscientiousness	0.570	0.022	51.215**	-0.588
	Neuroticism				0.228
	Extraversion				-0.162
	Conscientiousness	0.587	0.017	40.905**	-0.627
	Neuroticism				0.206
	Extraversion				-0.167
	Openness to Experience				0.138
Procrastination	Perceived Parental Responsiveness	0.059	0.059	7.369**	-0.242

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Relationship between Perceived Parenting and Procrastination

Perceived parental responsiveness was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with procrastination ($r = - 0.242$; $p < 0.01$). No significant relationship was seen between perceived parental control and procrastination. (See Table 2). The stepwise multiple regression model accounted for a total of 5.9% ($R^2 = 0.059$) of variance in procrastination scores solely produced by perceived parental responsiveness (See table 3).

Discussion

Gender Differences in Procrastination

The results indicate that procrastination is equally distributed among females and males. These findings are in line with several other studies that have reported no gender differences in the construct of procrastination (Joubert, 2015; Madhan, et al , 2012). This is understandable as the sample was drawn from colleges of a metropolitan city, where males and females are usually equally competitive and are exposed to similar classroom environments. Thus, both genders feel task ease or difficulty in a similar way and exhibit procrastination and associated task avoidant behavior in more or less the same way.

Relationship between Personality Traits and Procrastination

Conscientiousness and Procrastination: Individuals who were low in conscientiousness showed a higher degree of procrastination and vice-versa. Conscientiousness also contributed significantly to the prediction of procrastination. People who are highly conscientious know how to regulate their urges and impulses. They are self-disciplined and can successfully delay gratification. Such individuals act in a goal-directed manner and have the ability to complete tasks regardless of the distractions. Conversely, individuals

who are low in conscientiousness get easily distracted and seek immediate gratification. They tend to be disorganized and poor in time management. Therefore, low conscientiousness is associated with higher procrastination. These findings are in accord the previous studies (Joubert, 2015; McCloskey, 2011; Watson 2001).

Neuroticism and Procrastination: Results show that a high degree of neuroticism is associated with a higher tendency to procrastinate and neuroticism is a significant contributor to the prediction of procrastination. Neuroticism in Costa & McCrae's five factor model of personality is characterized by its facets including anxiety, anger, moodiness, impulsivity, proneness to stress and self-consciousness. Individuals who are high in neuroticism are impulsive and tend to act on their urges and yearnings. They seek pleasure and instant gratification of needs and desires. High emotional instability, anxiety and impulsivity in such individuals, makes it hard for them to follow a task through completion. Thus, they put off or delay important tasks. Instead, they tend to choose easier and pleasurable tasks for instant gratification and to escape stress. These findings are supported by various studies (Lee, Kelly and Edwards, 2006; Watson, 2001). Johnson and Bloom's (1995) facet analysis found impulsivity and vulnerability to be significant contributors in the prediction of procrastination.

Extraversion and Procrastination: As per the results, people with a lower degree of extraversion procrastinate more than those with a higher degree of extraversion. Extraversion also contributed significantly to the prediction of procrastination. These findings are in accordance with other studies (Watson, 2001). Schouwenburg & Lay's (1995) facet analysis showed that the 'activity' facet of extraversion was negatively associated with procrastination and also contributed significantly to the prediction of procrastination. They suggested that passivity and a slower pace of living are strongly associated with procrastination.

Results revealed no significant relationship between procrastination and agreeableness or openness to experience. These findings are in line with several other studies that suggest no significant association between them (Watson, 2001; Johnson & Bloom. 1995).

Relationship between Perceived Parenting and Procrastination

Perceived Parental Responsiveness and Procrastination: The results of the study showed that individuals who perceived their parent's responsiveness, support, warmth and acceptance to be high, scored low on procrastination. Furthermore, perceived parental responsiveness significantly predicted procrastination. These findings are supported by other studies (Mostafafi & Mortazanajad, 2009; Zakeri, Esfahani & Razmjoee, 2013).

Responsive parents promote autonomy, self-regulation and individuality in children. As a result, parental responsiveness cultivates self-determination and intrinsic motivation in children (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005) that further results in lower procrastination (Cavusoglu & Karatas, 2015). In a study done by Lungarini (2015), it was found that parental responsiveness was associated with lower anxiety in children. This is another reason for such children to exhibit a lesser degree of procrastination.

Perceived Parental Control and Procrastination: Previous literature has suggested a positive relationship between high parental control and procrastination (Sedlakova et al, 2014; Ferrari & Olivette, 1993). However, no significant relationship was found between perceived parental control and procrastination in the present study.

Most of the studies that have given an account of significant inter-linkages between parental control and procrastination have been conducted on school students or adolescents (Hong, et.al, 2015; Pychyl, Coplan & Reid, 2002). The role of parents' controlling and disciplining strategies is more impactful in young children. Yazici & Bulut (2015) also found no significant relationship between parental expectations and academic procrastination in undergraduate students. They suggested that college students are in the age when they have just stepped into early adulthood and thus, work and act according to their own targets and goals rather than by those set by their parents. They advocated that parental expectations and control do not have a noteworthy impact on the procrastination behaviour of college students or adults. Nevertheless, further studies are needed to foster a better understanding of the impact of parental control on procrastination in adults.

Eventhough parental control might not have a role in procrastination, parental responsiveness ensue a low probability of procrastination tendencies in young adults.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that procrastination in college students can be attributed to their personality traits and the degree of perceived parental responsiveness to some extent. An inverse relationship between parental responsiveness and procrastination points toward the fact that positive parenting, even in young adult children, leads to positive outcomes for them. Thus, positive parenting practices should be adopted by parents that include being warm, supportive, accepting and responsive to the needs of children.

A strong relationship between neuroticism and procrastination also paves way for clinical implications. Interventions can focus on helping neurotic individuals, who often complain of behaviors, to improve their time management and task approaching skills. For instance, procrastinators often underestimate the time required for the completion of a task and overestimate the time they have. They can be facilitated to develop better insight and create realistic goals and deadlines for themselves. Since people who procrastinate prefer doing activities that are easier or pleasurable instead of the important and urgent ones, thus interventions can focus on training such individuals to break important tasks into smaller steps and proceed in a hierarchical manner such that they do easier parts first and difficult ones later. In this way, successful completion of easier tasks will motivate them to go to the next step and ultimately follow the task through completion.

Future studies can look into the effectiveness of such training programs in reducing procrastination behavior.

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